

Testimony of Rep. Bart Stupak
House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and
the Environment
Hearing on Great Lakes Health
May 21, 2004

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before this Subcommittee to discuss Great Lakes water quality and restoration efforts. This is a significant issue for me and my constituents in Michigan's first congressional district – which is surrounded by the Great Lakes.

I commend Chairman Duncan and Ranking Member Costello for holding this hearing and for recognizing the importance of the health of the Great Lakes Basin, not only for the region, but for the nation as well.

As the world's largest freshwater body, and source of drinking water for over 30 million people, the restoration of the Great Lakes should be a top priority for both President Bush and for Congress.

Regrettably, nearly a year after its introduction, the bipartisan Great Lakes Restoration and Financing Act remains unfinished business in the 108th Congress. This legislation offers real hope for a solution to the challenge of cleaning up the Great Lakes.

It would bring together all the stakeholders – including local, state and Federal officials, as well as business, scientific and advisory groups – to create a Great Lakes Management Plan.

Just as important, it provides the funding to accomplish restoration. It's a smart, bipartisan approach, which is why the bill has garnered 106 cosponsors from both sides of the aisle and it deserves immediate consideration by the House.

That is more than can be said about the Administration's Great Lakes Executive Order announced earlier this week.

Since I was first elected to Congress in 1992, I have seen numerous Great Lakes studies performed. Let's be clear – the last thing we need is another study. We understand the issues that confront us. What we need is action. Yet where action is needed, we've been offered excuses. Where funding is needed to actually begin work on restoration, we've been offered more empty words.

There are already recommendations on the table and we need a comprehensive water plan that includes clean-up of toxic hot spots, combat invasive species, restore critical habitat, and ensure the economic sustainability of the Lakes.

The President's Executive Order doesn't provide one dollar to begin work. The General Accounting Office (GAO) has found that numerous strategizing, planning and coordinating efforts have failed to result in extensive Great Lakes restoration activity just for this reason – because there was no money to implement those recommendations.

I would also like to point out that the moratorium on new oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes is set to expire at the end of this fiscal year. It is essential to extend the moratorium in order to continue to protect the health of the Lakes and prevent further damage to this already endangered national treasure.

Another threat to the Great Lakes that we haven't touched on is water diversion. For the last 12 years I have worked to prevent the export of our freshwater outside of the region. While we are waiting for Annex 2001— an initiative to establish a basin-wide standard for water withdrawal put forth by the 8 Great Lakes Governors – to come to fruition, the Nestle Water bottling plant in my district is on track to divert over 130 million gallons of water this year.

With global water demand doubling every 21 years, we need to protect Great Lakes water resources from being depleted by diverting our water to thirsty regions.

We need to start putting our money where our mouth is and fund the clean-up of the Great Lakes, continue the moratorium on drilling, and put a stop to water diversion.

Thank you.